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February 14, 1979

Dear Senator Eagleton:

Thank you for your letter of January 5 requesting information for your constituent, Kenneth A. Gorman, regarding certain aspects of the Jonestown tragedy.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

The federal government does not pay the expense of bringing back the remains of Americans who die abroad. That is a responsibility of their families or, if no next of kin can be found, the country where the death occurred is responsible for burial. It was evident, however, that it was beyond the ability of individual families or of the facilities available in Guyana to resolve the unprecedented problems that characterized this situation. In fact it was not even clear who the next of kin were without identification being established. The families of those who died at Jonestown are, of course, expected to bear the responsibility for the disposition of the remains in the United States.

As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there might be many survivors in the jungle, and the U.S. adjusted and increased

The Honorable
Thomas F. Eagleton,
United States Senate.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Mark DATE 2/27/81
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its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the number of dead was clear, the operational requirements were to continue support of the extensive ongoing investigation of serious crimes and to identify, treat with dignity, and remove the bodies as quickly as possible to a facility that could deal with this immense problem. Extensive mortuary facilities were essential in the process of identification and investigation.

Only the U.S. military had the equipment and facilities to handle this enormous problem. The removal of the bodies from Guyana was at the specific request of the Government of Guyana

Vice President Mondale and Mrs. Carter had only one meeting with Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples Temple. They had both met Jones in San Francisco during a political rally in the 1976 Presidential election campaign. Neither the Vice President nor Mrs. Carter had any connection with the Peoples Temple.

Guyana is an independent country that calls itself the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. It is a constitutional democracy that is presently patterned after Great Britain from which it gained independence in 1966.

The Guyanese authorities have charged one member of the Peoples Temple with the murder of Congressman Ryan and other members of his party and he is presently on trial in Georgetown. Other members of the group that were involved in the assassination of the Congressman were found dead in Jonestown along with other members of the community.

I trust the above information answers your constituent's questions. If you have any further inquiries, you may wish to contact Mr. Richard McCoy, Officer-in-Charge of Guyanese Affairs. His telephone number is 632-3449.

Sincerely,

CW

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Correspondence returned.

Drafted: ARA/CAR:RMcCoy:fbl
2/2/79 X 23449 # 006-2093
Clearances: ARA/CAR:JGriffith
ARA:JABushnell
ARA:GLister
H:[redacted]
E. Taylor